

# I Want To Believe: A Study On the Moving Statue Phenomenon of 1985 and The Human Urge to Believe In the Miraculous - Focusing on Folklore, Superstition and The Supernatural

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# Introduction

What is a miracle? How does a miracle occur? Who believes in miracles? Why do we want to believe in miracles?

When one searches for the definition of the word, they are presented with the following explanation: “An extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by nature or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to divine legacy” (Oxford Languages, 2023). This is the explanation many people turned to when trying to comprehend the reports of moving statues taking place all over rural Ireland during the summer of 1985. But of course with technology, information and through the study of science, it is widely acknowledged that miracles and other supernatural events (essentially what a miracle is) to be a thing of fiction or impossibility. And yet still thousands upon thousands of people flocked to the small market town of Ballinspittle when rumours and stories spread of a miracle taking place there, despite the lack of any real evidence. Ballinspittle gained a newfound fame in a matter of weeks as the town became a place of pilgrimage to many and a media phenomenon. The following is an excerpt from an article that was in the Irish Times newspaper two months after the supposed apparitions began.

*Less than two weeks ago Ballinspittle was a quiet Co.Cork village of about 200 souls tucked away between the seaside towns of Kinsale and Garretstown. Then on a Tuesday, two ladies out for an evening stroll on the outskirts of the village stopped near the grotto built in honour of the Virgin Mary. They both saw the statue moving... Word spread like wildfire. On the Tuesday after the woman reported seeing the statue move, there were about 1000 visitors to Ballinspittle. (Hogan.D, 1985)*

Of course it's not the first time the west of Ireland has experienced an apparition like this. On the 21st of August 1879 it is said that the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph and St John the Evangelist appeared in the Co.Mayo rural village of Knock, as said in Hynes book (2008), which has since become one of Europe's major Catholic Marian shrines alongside the likes of Lourdes and Fatima. Similar to Knock, any reports of moving statues came from rural, religious villages. Why is it that the divine and supernatural are only seen in these quiet bucolic corners of Ireland? *“There have been very few reports of ‘moving’ statues in Dublin or other large urban centres” (Ryan.T et al, 1985, pg 42)*

Although both events are similar in location, there is over a hundred years time difference between the two. When the Virgin Mary was seen in Knock, electricity wasn't even in the country yet. Surely in those hundred years of science, technology and education, people would be more hesitant to believe stories of inanimate objects coming to life? Turns out it

was quite the opposite and crowds of visitors appeared each day, even after a scientific explanation was provided for the whole affair.

*Five staff members from the Department of Applied Psychology at University College Cork, say there is a perfectly ordinary explanation for the moving statues reported in Cork. They are calling it the "Ballinspittle Phenomenon" and say the movement is not caused by a miracle but by light conditions. The five carried out experiments to explain the" movements".(Hogan.D, 1985)*

Ireland is a country of rich culture including a strong history of folklore which perhaps makes our people more lenient and accepting when it comes to stories of supernatural occurrences. Using stories to ease the hard truth of situations has often been a common way of processing uncomfortable information in the past and present. *"The Irish have a much higher threshold for surrealism, having lived through a history where the unimaginable usually happens and the anticipated almost never occurs."* (O'Doherty.C, 2014)

This could have been one of the many factors that helped the Ballinspittle Phenomenon take off in the way it did with the country being in a difficult economic state at the time as suggested by Tóibín.C (1985). Throughout this essay my aim is to try to understand why so many people believed in a phenomenon like the moving statues and the factors that helped them to do so. Where does this unspoken urge to believe in the miraculous and supernatural come from? And why do I want to so desperately believe?

## **Chapter 1: Belief and Location**

Rural Ireland is known for its beautiful scenery, historical ruins and rich folklore stories. It's often described as a magical place, unique in its ancient charm. West Cork is a prime example of this with its striking coastline, pretty towns and exciting past. With my mother being born and raised in Union Hall, a small fishing village in West Cork, I am constantly visiting family who still live there and have a strong bond with the area. As a child who always had a keen interest in fairytale and folklore, I believed it to be an enchanting place covered in forests and lakes far away from my suburban life in Dublin. With this in mind, I was not surprised to learn about the Ballinspittle Phenomenon (Tóibín.C's,1985, term for the affair which I will continue to use) after growing up hearing reports of local statues crying blood and being warned about a phantom ship, as mentioned by Carroll.M.J (2001), appearing on the lake near my grandparents house during every visit. In other words I believe Ballinspittle was the perfect place for a miracle to occur due to factors like the history of the location mixed with the common psyche of the locals. Using information I've learned

by having conversations with my mother and through my own experience, I am going to further investigate these reasons in an attempt to identify how this phenomenon was hugely supported by the place of its origin, showing how the area had and has an influence on people's beliefs consciously and subconsciously.

## 1.1 Fairy Lore and Folk Beliefs in Rural Ireland

The Irish are known to be superstitious people that have a long history of believing in fairies on top of being highly religious. And although many would argue that the belief in fairies, or 'the little folk' as some call them, is ridiculous it is still common practice to avoid disturbing fairy forts and respecting locations known to 'belong to them'. Eugene Hynes describes it well when talking about 'local worlds' in his book:

*While admitting that 'it is impossible to be sure how much genuine popular belief lay behind fairylore, Sean Connolly has argued that some behaviours such as avoiding fairy forts and not removing certain bushes 'cannot be seen as anything other than manifestations of serious and deeply held beliefs. (Hynes, 2008)*

These traditions are so deeply ingrained in the minds of many, particularly farmers, that it is not even given a second thought, it's just standard practice. This sets the stage for Ballinspittle, a quiet rural village whose residents have preexisting supernatural beliefs and carry out conscious acknowledgements of their existence. While searching for information on Ballinspittle using the National Folklore Collection in UCD, I discovered a collection of folklore and local history stories from Baile an Spidéail (school) (Ballinspittle, Co. Cork), collected as part of the Schools' Folklore Scheme, 1937-1938 (*National Folklore Foundation, 2014/2016*). After reading through the stories, there are multiple mentions of a holy well in Ballinspittle that is said to cure 'sore eyes' as one of the children called it or in other words, blindness: *"It is a well dug into the ground about three feet deep and over it there is a cluster of briars. The water is supposed to heal sore eyes..." (National Folklore Foundation, 2014/2016)*. In Daithi O Hogain's book 'Irish Superstitions' (1995), he mentions holy wells, the cleansing power they possess and how what was once an ancient celtic belief was adopted into Christian practice.

This strengthens my point that the people of Ballinspittle already had beliefs about the supernatural and the divine years before the Ballinspittle Phenomenon occurred. So it's only natural that they would be more prone to jump to a supernatural conclusion than a scientific one.

Struggling to realise why people held onto these beliefs in the first place, Hynes (2008) explains how social scientists couldn't make sense of it until they were forced to see the impact passed down tradition and belief really had, particularly in the rural areas where family and tradition are the most important parts of life for a lot of people.

*It is as if researchers present fairylore as a worldview that people accepted merely because that is what they had always believed: that it was traditional, passed on from earlier generations in the normal process of socialisation people got their beliefs from their parents generation, who got it from their parents and so on, ad infinitum. (Hynes, 2008, pg.12)*

This gives us an insight into the traditional beliefs that are already present in the psyche of many Irish people. This being said, I will move onto my next area of discussion about my own mothers upbringing in this environment and demonstrate how the beliefs of their parents were passed down to her and eventually, in some ways, to myself.

## **1.2 A West Cork Upbringing**

One of the main reasons why I'm so fascinated by this phenomenon is the knowledge that my mother, Anne O'Callaghan, really was in the centre of it all, growing up only forty minutes away from the famous grotto and being raised on a farm by religious parents who grew up in that same vicinity. A large, traditional family, the O'Callaghans consisted of Mary and Micheal along with their six children Cathrine, Patrick, Anne, Tom, Maura and Irene (*Family Photo, 1984*). Mass every Sunday morning was a must for the family although my mother says she was a sceptic and had her doubts around religion, in contrast to her parents devotion. But despite this natural scepticism towards God, she did inherit the superstition that comes with growing up on that land, particularly farm land. Like I mentioned previously, it was common practice to avoid fairy forts and anything related to them and this is exactly what the family did and do till this day when a ring of mushrooms was found in one of the fields. This was shown to me on many occasions when visiting as a child and I always received the same warning to never step inside the fort. In Manchán Magan's article about fairy forts for '*The Irish Times*' (2017) he sums up how serious these beliefs really were to farmers:

*Why else would rational, sophisticated farmers still go to the trouble of leaving unproductive patches of weeds and wild nature in their meticulously manicured, expensively fertilised and pesticided fields? (Magan.M, 2017)*

The fort is still there today, believed to be an entrance to the fairy realm or perhaps just their humble abode. The same field had lots of history attached to it with the remains of a castle named 'Castle Eyre' located in its corner. Through family stories I learned the castle is said to have belonged to Ímar Ua Donnubáin who was a celebrated petty king, navigator, trader and sorcerer/necromancer of thirteenth century Ireland. And the story goes that Ivor and his ship are still enchanted in the Lake, Lough Cluhir, that the castle overlooks, appearing every few years to warn people of their shortcoming death. This is a legend I was told once as a child and never forgot out of fear that I would accidentally catch a glimpse of Ua Donnubain's ship on the lake and come to a quick demise. Up until recent years, I had never heard this story anywhere other than the mouths of my family; however, last year I was finally able to find mention of it in a book titled *'Castles and Fortified Houses Of West Cork'* by Micheal J. Carroll (2001) where it briefly mentions the myth and describes the character of Ivor who was also known as *Giolla Roabach* or the swarthy warrior. *"Annals of The Four Masters' describes his phantom ship appearing every seven years on Lough Cluhir 'Under full sails and with flags flying'."* (Carroll.M.J, 2001,pg 119)

This is another example of the kind of stories my mother and others from West Cork grew up surrounded by, providing an inside look into the lives and upbringing people had living in rural Ireland in the twentieth century. Even though some tales are more believed and practised than others (fairy fort in comparison to ghost ship) they still help form a view of the history and attitude towards stories of the divine and supernatural and how these beliefs were common to many already, before any moving statue phenomenon.

## **Chapter 2: The Psychology Behind It, Why we hope for the impossible**

One of the most fascinating elements of the 'Ballinspittle phenomenon' that puzzled the world was the amount of people claiming to actually have witnessed a miracle. Although this was taking place in 1985, long after science had deemed anything of the supernatural sort unlikely, the crowds continued to arrive day in, day out, with the majority seeing the Virgin Mary rocking, swaying, transforming and moving her hands etc. *"Seventy percent of those present were satisfied that they had witnessed a supernatural happening"* (Ryan.T et al, 1985, pg. 16). What's interesting is that when a scientific explanation was provided, which obviously existed, the numbers didn't falter and believers clung to their experience of having seen a divine/ supernatural occurrence. It was said by Ryan.T and Kirakowski.J (2001) that the church, very confused at where to stand within all of this, attempted to warn visitors about the unlikelihood of a supernatural force at play here and to use their common sense which also did very little to keep the phenomenon at bay. So why, with science and religion

both disapproving and condemning the whole affair, were so many still convinced of a miracle? Some say it was mass hysteria to do with the sociological state of the country at the time, others say it was simply ‘a great August story’ (Tóibín.C, 1985). Either way there are strong psychological reasons why the people of Cork and Ireland may have needed a miracle such as the Ballinspittle Phenomenon and why in general our psyche desires happenings of the sort.

## 2.1 How We Benefit From Believing

*“Despite the growing dominance of scientific reasoning, superstition, pseudoscience, and magical thinking did not go away” (Vyse.S, 2020).* As I previously mentioned, Ireland is a country full of folklore and therefore had many folk beliefs that were passed down each generation, despite the development of science and religion. This is where superstitions originated, though not quite as serious as the beliefs they come from and are usually seen as silly ideals that are in no way connected with common sense or rational thought (Ó hÓgáin.D, 1995). Superstitions survive the test of time because they serve an important role in our psyche that not many of us are aware of, allowing them to still exist in this day and age.

*These beliefs are related to human feeling and to psychological needs and so - no matter how far fetched they appear - always have something to tell about our attitudes towards life and towards the world around us. (Ó hÓgáin.D, 1995, pg.7)*

Ó hÓgáin breaks down in simple terms how their main function is to provide us with a sense of control. The majority of common superstitions are fairly harmless, acting as a coping method for a lot of us by sometimes reducing anxiety and providing an illusion of control over a situation. This is the same psychological function they provided in the past but in more extreme ways due to the lack of science. Thus came the existence of fairies, sprites and other mystical beings causing either bliss or havoc, the perfect outlet to blame the unexplainable. Ó hÓgáin explains further how the ‘puzzling features of the world’ and ‘unexplainable occurrences’ led to the belief that earth had to have been inhabited by other supernatural beings, just as real as humans. In today's society, these superstitions are hidden further below the surface of the human psyche but still present when triggered. This gives us some insight into how humans are and have always been keen to believe in the supernatural/paranormal or magical/divine, a trait surely amplified growing up in Ireland. As Colm Tóibín mentions in his book ‘*Seeing Is Believing: Moving Statues In Ireland*’ (1985), the Irish are naturally very imaginative, creative people, more so than they would be



religiously-minded people, which explains why we might be more drawn to the miraculous than religious such as superstitious and supernatural beliefs/explanations. It can also be said that the Irish had the right amount of pre-existing superstition that was needed to blow life into a phenomenon like that of the moving statues.

This craving for the supernatural didn't just emerge from our superstitious past. In Abby Ponticello's article '*Why Humans Crave The Supernatural*' (no date), she speaks to existential psychologist Clay Routledge about how these notions "*function as an antidote to anxieties about our own mortality*" and how being open to supernatural behaviour gives us hope and helps us to process the complicated ways of the world we live in.

*In a lot of ways, supernatural beliefs are a form of psychological medicine in that they help us deal with some of the difficulties in life, and our need to grapple with the big existential questions. (Ponticello.A et al, no date)*

I will continue to explore the above ideals in more detail but in regards to what took place in Ballinspittle the summer of 1985 and what can be said about the psyche of the people statue watching at that time.

## **2.2 Ireland in 1985 - The Need for a Miracle**

At the time, journalists and the public were jumping to conclusions that the 'Ballinspittle Phenomenon' was an episode of mass hysteria corrupting the country (Hogan.D, 1985), which was under severe sociological and political stress at the time. Other famous examples of this include the Salem Witch Trials, taking place from 1692 to 1693, which resulted in the execution of over twenty civilians (Blumberg.J, 2007). In the dictionary, mass hysteria is described to be '*a frenzied emotional state that affects a large number of people at the same time*' (collinsdictionary, 2023). This didn't exactly line up with the happenings at Ballinspittle as visitors were actually seeing movement however there was some sort of psychological marvel taking place. Ireland was stuck in, as Tóibín(1985) puts it, a moral crossroads with half the population ready to move forwards in terms of contraceptives, divorce and women's rights while the other remained committed to the church's teachings. The statement below describes how many parents no longer sided with the church's views when it came to teaching their children right and wrong.

*Many of their parents have already refused to accept the Church's teachings on such matters as contraception, the indissolubility of marriage or even on what is and isn't a mortal sin (Tóibín.C, 1985, pg. 46)*

Others, particularly older Irish Catholics, wished for this new enlightenment to go away for fear of the intellectual challenges it would bring with it. Their desperate yearning for old traditions against the younger generations' constantly growing distance from religion and christian beliefs was causing uncertainty as people didn't know where to look in terms of faith. Shocking reports coming out about the Bishop of Galway warning the doctors in his diocese *'that the sterilisation of women is repugnant to Catholic Church teaching'* (Tóibáin.C, 1985, pg. 47) even when the experts merited it, didn't help the situation. At the same time the Kerry Babies Tribunal was taking place, bringing to light the treatment of unmarried mothers in society and how they were heavily judged by the church and the Garda alike. Losing trust and faith in both these establishments was a huge blow to many.

*'A high moral tone reflecting the established sexual mores of the era pervaded the hearing. Lights were shone into many dark corners of so-called hidden Ireland.'*  
(Hickey.D, 2021, *The Irish Examiner* )

The public needed and desired some form of re-assurance and were, in some forms, subconsciously manifesting a miracle to rekindle faith and love in the community. With this knowledge in mind one can see how an uncommon optical illusion of light could be interpreted as a miraculous occurrence, hugely supported by the intense longing to believe in something miraculous happening. T.P O'Mahony, who was the Religious Affairs correspondent of the *Irish Press* in 1985, spoke out about the worry that this kind of escapism was spurring in many around the country (Ryan.T et al, 1985). He labelled these kinds of supernatural beliefs *"an unwillingness to face our problem and work out our own solution"*. As I mentioned earlier, he reiterates our subconscious desires for a higher, external 'power' to intervene in our mundane problems. Economically, Ireland wasn't in the best position either, particularly farming regions such as West Cork. The weather had a huge impact on the harvests as well as everyone's mood (Ryan.T et al, 1985). Money was tight and in most houses the mother and father would both have to work in order to keep a sustainable income for their larger families of that time. Ryan and Kirakowski (1985), compare the odd climate conditions to those present during the famine year which had them asking the question *"What sort of racial memories were being triggered?"*. This shows us how sometimes when things get tough, socially and economically, religious cults and movements begin to pop up, providing a psychological safety net. *"Trying to cope with this level of deprivation, the argument runs, it is not surprising that people are turning to miracles"* (Ryan.T et al, 1985 pg 72)

With this information and that of the previous section, one could see how during the stressful times of 1985, perhaps Ballinspittle manifested a miracle to help cope with the pressures of life. This could also be applied to our own personal times of trouble as many of us turn to superstition without even realising.

## **2.3 Another Example**

A similar phenomenon to that of the moving statues, which is still an ongoing affair around the world, is that of UFO sightings. CG Jung's book *'Flying Saucers, A Modern Myth Of Things Seen In The Sky'* (1978), focuses not on the reality aspect of this but the psychic one instead. Jung uses the phrase *'a modern myth'* to describe the phenomenon, a term I believe could be easily applied to Ireland's moving statue phenomenon of 1985. Breaking down how a 'living myth' can be formed, he takes a deeper look into human psychic longings and manifestations, informing us on *"how in a difficult and dark time for humanity a miraculous tale grows"* (Jung.CG, 1978, pg.16) and thus a legend is formed. With such a well known phenomenon like this in mind, the sights at the grotto don't seem so ridiculous in comparison and I've come to accept that it is a part of human nature and the human psyche that has been active in us all since childhood. Reiterating previous statements that these miracles and sightings all come down to hope, escapism and comfort, Jung(1978) also comes to the conclusion that these more serious cases such as the UFO and Moving statue phenomena are signs that the earth has grown too small for our adventurous spirit and as a result hope for situations that question our concrete ideas of reality. The desperation for more to exist past the factual world we know is present within all of us, all over the planet whether we choose to acknowledge it or not.

## **Chapter 3: Why do I want to believe?**

While the previous two chapters have immensely helped my understanding around the conditioned thinking of the human psyche, in regards to superstition and belief in alternate realities, as well as the impact my Irish heritage has on my own, I still feel there are more elements at play here that drew me to study the Ballinspittle Phenomenon and others like it. Why do I find myself so compelled when it comes to stories of the miraculous or supernatural? Indeed it is a form of escapism for all of us, in times of stress or boredom but I know there is more at play here that awakens my inner child and creative spirit. Why have I been making art around these subjects for the past two years? Why do I get a rush of

warmth and excitement upon hearing a new tale of the fantastical? Why do I want to believe a miracle took place in Ballinspittle so badly even though my sceptical brain says otherwise? I attempt to explore these personal feelings further that perhaps many relate to but have yet to speak up about.

### 3.1 Nostalgia for Childhood

The first birthday feeling miserable that I can consciously remember was that of my fourteenth. I was disgusted and would reluctantly say thank you when I received birthday wishes that evening at swim training. Reflecting back on it now, this reaction seems ridiculous as fourteen is extremely young in the eyes of my now twenty one year old self soon to be twenty two. Nowadays I find it's almost the norm to resent one's own birthday and I know very few souls my age who actively look forward to the occasion. Whether this is due to us now being in our twenties instead of teens, the impossibility of moving out of home in Dublin or due to years lost to covid, many of us are reluctant to accept ageing and full adulthood. Like most children, I enjoyed stories containing magic and folktales of otherworldly beings, unaware yet that science had deemed any such possibility impossible. In this stage of immature bliss, everything was magical. From playing in the woods hoping to find evidence of fairies to the most anticipated night of the year : Christmas Eve, there is still a wondrous feeling when reflecting upon that part of my developing years. All of which came to a swift end when I learned that Santa Claus isn't real, this being a natural progression for many children, but the odd few not so much. Nine year old me was devastated, not about the fact I'd been lied to, but because none of it existed. Perhaps dramatic but the world felt like a different place from then on and the following Christmases, I mourned that last special one. Unable to let go of the past, I aged reluctantly, every year further away from my magical childhood. However, before long I discovered a new way to cope with this the same way many do by spending my time consuming fictional films, media and literature about fantasy and supernatural phenomena. This is in fact a hugely popular genre for young adult readers, many of them experiencing the same transitional difficulties from child to adult as I did.

*Many young-adult readers, wanting to travel beyond self and environment, turn to the literature of fantasy, supernatural phenomena, and science fiction. There, they seek to satisfy a curiosity about forces that lie beyond reality (Parks Bushman.K et al, 1993,pg.78)*

Whether it be science fiction, paranormal, fantasy, occult, religious etc., these are all ways we use to envision a world outside our own in a more acceptable format, through fiction. In

Victoria Nelson's book *'The Secret Life Of Puppets'* (2001) she focuses on these ideas and how consuming art forms of the fantastical and miraculous is a way that we, in our society dominated by science, actually allow ourselves to believe for a short period of time. In fact we can see our own repressed religious desires by looking at the ever constant themes of supernatural and impossible recurring every decade in our books and films (Nelson.V, 2001). I think the nostalgia aspect that we subconsciously associate around these beliefs has been overlooked and not explored enough in many of the texts I've read while researching. The urge to go back to our youth and reminisce on childhood innocence is common within all of us, especially as one gets older. Any excuse would do for the chance to go back in time and see the world in a more simplistic light and I think essentially, that is what believing in these phenomena allows us to do. To feel like a child again, to exist in a time where the existence of god wasn't something that needed to be questioned, to be filled with the excitement that comes with these. I have acknowledged this to be perhaps the primary reason why I am so invested in these subjects. I simply miss my wonderful childhood.

### **3.2 An Artists Outlook**

An important part of my psyche that has to be addressed is that of my creative perception of the world as I am an artist. Although I know that many if not most people who visited Ballinspittle were not creatives, I still wonder, does a creative or artistic mind make one more interested or susceptible to these 'false' beliefs and phenomenon? Artists have a long history of dealing with the subject matter of the supernatural, often because these themes and stories are a gateway into expressing the beliefs and desires of people using alluring imagery and symbolism. Again in Nelson's book *'The Secret Life Of Puppets'* she explains how art is the truest form of expression and that in recent years art is a more popular way of learning and gaining knowledge due to the fact that it derives from one's imagination therefore expressing our purest thoughts with no judgement . *'We turn to works of the imagination to learn how our living desire to believe in a transcendent reality has survived outside our conscious awareness'* (Nelson.V, 2001).

There are no right, wrong, valid or invalid thoughts in art, just expression and how each individual interprets that. A huge number of artists work through folklore, fiction and old beliefs that appeal and resonate with many due to the feeling that it's valid or acceptable to do so when portrayed through art, much like I mentioned previously in regards to film and literature. And this is one of the many ways in which they compliment each other. Creating art or adding artistic depictions of folk beliefs allow us to understand them better and act as a form of control over the beliefs themselves (Addis.S, 1985), giving us more access to gain a

deeper understanding. This is spoken about in *'Japanese Ghosts and Demons, Art Of The Supernatural'* (Addis.S, 1985, pg 178) in regards to Japanese culture using illustration as a tool to process their beliefs. (pg.178) In 2009 an exhibition entitled 'The Dark Monarch: Magic And Modernity In British Art' took place in the Tate St Ives, Cornwall, containing art that explores the presence of folklore, mysticism, mythology, and the occult in British art from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day (Bracewell.M et al, 2009). The exhibition really highlighted the common ground that art and the supernatural/magic share, constantly merging into one another over the many years of existence. *"Both are obscure, hermetic practices, engaged in a search for revelation, meaning and truth"* (Bracewell et al, 2009, pg. XI,)

Similar to that of folk/supernatural beliefs, art is a process that can be free of any sort of logic and explanation, giving it a *"mysterious, potent and essential force"* (Bracewell et al, 2009) that is shared with magic and life. This is a partnership with a rich history which will cease to end anytime soon thanks to human nature and our psychic needs. Young artists like myself who are using these ideas in our current practices are proof of this. I believe this information shows why artists are attracted to tales of the magical or miraculous and thus, why I am so drawn to the happenings of Ballinspittle the summer of 1985.

## **Conclusion**

When completing this study, my main goals were to gain a better understanding of human belief and intrigue around the miraculous and/or supernatural, focusing on the moving statue phenomenon of 1985. I wanted to know why so many believed or wanted to believe a miracle was at hand. I wanted to delve deeper into my own psyche as well as theirs and process why after forty years, I too find myself wanting to be a believer with them.

Through the study of folklore and folk beliefs in Ireland I've demonstrated, although under the surface, how many of us still harbour the outlooks and traditions associated with them making us more susceptible to believing that the unexplained are happenings of the divine or supernatural, providing a possible reason for the occurrence of the Ballinspittle phenomenon . This process of thinking is part of our heritage and not something that dissipates easily and continues to show in our actions and judgement today. By dissecting the reasoning behind superstitious beliefs and the service they provide us, one can see how a miracle was needed in 1985 Ireland, under immense sociological and economical pressure at the time. The craving for the supernatural is imbedded in human nature which explains why we all feel the urge to believe.

I also found that for me as well as many others I'm sure, nostalgia is a big factor as the desire to return to the innocence and possibility of childhood is a strong one. Miraculous happenings fill one with a sense of wonder acting as a form of escapism from the science driven reality we're so accustomed to. Art, its own world of endless possibilities, compliments these alternative beliefs and allows them to flourish in a space of no judgement which is why suppressed unconscious beliefs often come to light in its hands, allowing me as an artist to understand why these themes are recurring in my own work and why creatives are so drawn to them.

I believe that through my research of these separate yet interlinked components, it is clear that the need to believe is essential and will always be present within humans and thus phenomena like that of the moving statues will continue to reappear as a form of comfort, allowing us to believe in miracles, even for a short moment in time.





*(1984), O'Callaghan Family Photo, Glandore, Co. Cork, Ireland.*



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